

A Pretty
Place to
Mourn

a story in verse

Jan LaPerle

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Prologue

Silently For Me

I have been practicing being here now.
This practice, it is said, ought to ease the anxiety, the fears:
the voices of these five women
(my fears – so big, so clear –
they have taken on lives of their own).
Let me clarify, these five women are my fears.

I focus on the senses (this being essential
to the practice); I stand in the grasses as my husband mows.
I smell only cut grass.
The smell cuts across my mood like the blade
of a mower. The hum of mower behind the house
cut by the house (I am in front of the house),
and the hum of a passing car
meets the mower's hum.
A Tennessee waltz.

Linette cuts in; I feel her.
Her hair tall grass.
Olive slips in through the *scent* of grass –
as she, too, smells of the work of the yard.
From the baby monitor, on the front step,
my baby cries
and Margaret's babies and Margeret holding them.
The crying stops, all of it,
and Rosie is there pulling Pearl
from the house shadows.

I am never alone.
This is my now, my senses: these women.

These grasses freshly cut – each blade now two.
The cut pieces lying on top of their other halves
(silently for me): husbands and wives; mother and child;
friends; women and their fears.
The slice of the ends so fresh upon them.
This cut smells like summer
and I hate that it will end.

~

I am afraid.
I am afraid these women will never leave me,
and, too, that they will –
I know them better than I know myself –
they are a part of me, grown from me:
I am their mother, though (like mothers) they mother me.
My love for them hangs in some dark closet on a hanger
next to hate. On a cold night I wear them both,
but it is summer; it is hot.

These five women are so much prettier than other women
and that makes it so much easier to love them,
as you know.

~

These women – products,
or byproducts.
I believe they must believe they are real.

If they are heavy, overweight,
it is my fault alone.
I have fed them for years.
Fear: the fast food of the emotional highway.
French fries. Processed meats.
A milkshake in the largest Styrofoam you can find, please.
What rots there in my belly?
If the five women only knew *I* did this to them,
they'd hate me.
They are (I'm pretty sure) oblivious.

I've sent a doctor out into this fury
with hope (skinny a form of hope enough).
Hope in the form of the red pill.
Hope: such a neat thing.
Tidy as a bow.

~

I know I need to kill them.
These women!
I'll do so lovingly,
so they won't hate me
or haunt me
or maybe they won't even notice they've died.

Paper by an open window falls to the floor.

~

In the years I've lived here the old women next door
has tended her flower gardens beautifully.

This spring she fell,
broke her hip.

By the end of the summer her yard is over-
run by weeds.

I visit her. She sits in a wheel chair and looks out.
Parked car.

I tell her about our summer days, the camping.
My daughter in the background runs full-speed
from chair to chair.

The contrast here cuts through me.
She says these days are over for her.

Sometimes, from our upstairs bedroom window,
I watch her sit on the front porch.

I watch her watch.

Through her I see these ends;
they split these pretty days open.
She hires a man to trim her hedges.

I listen to the trimmer snap.

I watch her watch the leaves
as if she were willing them to fall.

This woman, is she real?

These five women, I smell them, too,
more clearly, even.

They are more real to me.

~

I am still here,
breathing and smelling grass.

I move from the front lawn to clothesline.

The mower cuts off.

Sheets from the line soft as hair.

The old woman is on her porch.

As hard as the seat beneath her,

I am filled with knowing

the next time I look

she'll be gone.

These women always snap me awake.

I throw the clothespins in their bag,

each makes a little snap

small as a knuckle and quieter.

An Introduction

Dough

This, the story of five women.
All of them, meat and skin
 thick on their bones.
A wooden spoon in a bowl of dough.
The faces of these women at home
 in oven light:
warm, and the dough rises
 explodes
(into something utterly perfect);
scrape them from the sides:

Pearl
Linette
Margaret
Olive
Rosie.

Count them on one hand.
Hold them in your hand.
Hand them to me (I'll care for them).
My hands sweat; I am nervous for them.
They slip.

~

There are many parts of me.
These parts are roots beneath the dirt, searching,
growing into and around the roots of others.
Other parts, like leaves, worn like a dress,
fall at night to the floor.

~

The heads of the roses grow heavy in the rain.
Inside, the roses in the wallpaper look so real.
I rub myself against the wall – perfume.
These five women, flowers in wall paper.

~

A dusting of pollen over everything.
Fear.

Snap (version one)

Five women: five forms of loneliness like five forms of water.

The pre-gather, the line before it has formed the circle:
the women are alone, but in all ways together,
and with the rain; they'll understand Pearl's marriage,
how it began, its quick disintegration – a summer shower
on a pretty day, how quickly it comes,
but rain on skin is different to all of them,
and Linette hears the rain fall into the sinkhole
where her husband disappeared, the rain
an echoing; she waits for the sun and a warm wet cloud
rises from the great hole, and as it clears, she waits to find
her husband there where the cloud sits down in the grasses,
where Rosie is walking – dew, like the sadness of losing
her daughter, has settled onto everything: it slides
down Olive's glass, that clean glass so terribly barren
and the air conditioner snaps on, waking Margaret's babies;
the cries and of these women: rain nourishing the weeds
as they stretch toward the sun so quickly,
and beneath the surface,
strangling everything in their path.

